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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000358

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STATE PASS USTR FOR USTR AGAMA
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [CM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FORMER BAKASSI RESIDENTS ADEQUATELY CARED
FOR, FUTURE UNCERTAIN

REF: A. STATE 71955

- [1](#)B. LAGOS 243
- [1](#)C. LAGOS 317
- [1](#)D. ABUJA 1626
- [1](#)E. ABUJA 1632
- [1](#)F. ABUJA 1636

[1](#)1. 1. (SBU) Summary: While the Red Cross and others estimate that 9,500 families or between 40,000 and 70,000 people have left the Bakassi Peninsula for Nigeria since the completion of the August 14 handover to Cameroon, only a small fraction of that number of people were observed in a recent tour of a resettlement center in Cross River State on August 19. Repeated questioning about where the present whereabouts of the remainder of the former Bakassi residents produced only vague answers about being "with family." Poloff was told that there were no other resettlement centers despite press accounts to the contrary. Facilities and security at the center were minimal but adequate. Residents did not express any particular desire to return to Bakassi, however, an unofficial spokesman for the residents said that they wanted to be allowed to settle wherever in Nigeria they wanted rather than in the housing under construction for them, which he claimed did not meet their needs. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On August 19 Poloff and PolSpec visited both the old and new resettlement centers for former Bakassi residents at Ekpri Ikang in Cross River State. Poloff was told by Red Cross staff and State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) workers and residents that this was the only operating resettlement center, but the press has reported a number of others allegedly operating in other states. Although both the Red Cross and an unofficial spokesman for residents speaking in the presence of a large crowd who nodded assent estimated that 9,500 families had been displaced from Bakassi it appeared that no more than 2,000 people were housed in the Ekpri Ikang center. Asked where the rest of the displaced persons were living produced only vague gestures and references to being "with family."

[1](#)3. (U) Conditions at the center were basic, but adequate. Several police officers were on duty in a small gatehouse at the entrance, but Poloff and PolSpec were allowed access without difficulty. Residents appeared to be free to come

and go as they pleased. At the entrance to a former school, a Red Cross office had been set up, and a representative there said that residents' major complaint was depression. There was no evidence of unrest or anger among the center's residents. The residents were housed in unfurnished, former classrooms of the school, and slept on the floor. The school's sanitary facilities were functioning adequately. The center had a walk-in clinic manned by one doctor and seven nurses. No patients were in bed and the nurses said no one in the center was suffering from a serious illness. Officials said a primary school operated in the center, and that food was delivered daily by the SEMA. No reserves of food are kept at the center and no mention was made of how long food deliveries will continue. Other than the representatives of the Red Cross and SEMA, no other aid organizations, domestic or international, or NGOs were in evidence at the center.

14. (U) According to Dr. Theo Osin Onyuko of the Cross River State Youth Assembly, Bassey Ekpo Bassey, the traditional ruler of Calabar, and Charles Ayassang, spokesmen for the Rivers State residents of the resettlement center, most of the displaced families from Bakassi have roots in other Niger Delta states and only moved to Bakassi in the last few decades. Ayassang said that most of the displaced families moved to Bakassi in the last half century. (Note: Nigerians will customarily claim strong ties to their "home state" even several generations after leaving it for other regions. End Note.) Assayang insisted that almost all residents at the center wish to return to these other states and not settle in Cross River State. The crowd collected around Ayassang

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nodded in agreement with this statement.

15. (U) Poloff and PolSpec then visited homes being built in Ekpri Ikang by Cross River State with federal money for people displaced from Bakassi. The structures are small, one-story duplexes, each with a single room, bath and small kitchen. Total area was estimated at 50 square feet. Nigerians present claimed the houses were inadequate and they complained about lack of privacy and room for children. Ayassang stressed that his people were fishermen and did not want to live inland. He argued that rather than building houses for them inland in Cross River State, the Federal Government should give each family money to build their own home anywhere they wanted to live.

16. (U) Comment: Either many of the former Bakassi refugees have already relocated on their own initiative, or there are other resettlement centers operating in other areas which the people at Ekpri Ikang did not know about or did not want to talk about. The people still at the center may be those who hope to get some kind of financial settlement from the federal or state government to compensate them for their move, whereas those who have already relocated may have stronger ties elsewhere in Nigeria or lower expectations for government support. The houses under construction do not appear to meet the needs of those in the resettlement center, and may act as an incentive for the displaced to seek permanent relocation elsewhere. End comment.

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